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AUTHOR DeShon, David S.
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ABSTRACT

A team leadership program for academic administration was undertaken at the University of Akron under Kellogg Foundation Funding. A screened sample of 108 persons was admitted to training, which consisted of role analysis, education in the structure and function of the university and higher education in general, team building, analysis of intergroup relations, process consultation, and practice in alternative decision-making skills. The program's accomplishments include these: the use of consultants from within and outside the institution lent both continuity and credibility to the project; the participants were of high caliber and were sources of influence on campus; the varied composition of classes gave the program breadth and depth; use of simulations was very successful; and an expanded pool of trained decision-makers was developed. Several matters need followup: maintaining energy and commitment for change; shifting from a broad, institution-wide program of change to more local, intensive efforts; periodic surveys of the organization, as a form of regular feedback; and most important, training, data gathering, and feedback sessions with the people within the institution who compose a particular work group, for horizontal administrative leadership. (MSE)

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THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON: IF WE HAD IT TO DO OVER- HINDSIGHT AND FORESIGHT

David S. DeShon, Task Think Workshops, Inc.

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ABSTRACT

Based upon a relevant application of organization theory and some shrewd guesses, the "development of team leadership" proved to be an appropriate intervention into the decision-making processes of The University of Akron. This paper will 1), examine some of the manifest advantages of the team leadership approach, 2), develop some of the latent opportunity costs which were incurred as a result of that choice, and 3), suggest some avenues which could have been, or might still be applied to the project. It is hoped that the experiences gained there and candidly shared here will be of use to others who may adopt the team leadership form of intervention.

BACKGROUND

The summative evaluation of the Kellogg sponsored, team leadership program at The University of Akron is in process. However, at this juncture it is possible to make some assessments of the venture. These will refer not only to what was done there; but also to what might have been done if we had had in advance the benefit of experience.

The program had the great advantage of its Kellogg funding. This gave it high visibility on the campus and a sufficient "critical mass" to focus attention quickly and visibly on the change process. Even those with an investment in the status quo were put on notice that here was a change intervention that had the endorsement of the upper administration. (President Guzzetta served as chairman of the program and played an active role in program planning and implementation.)

The selection of team leadership as the primary intervention strategy was also quite fortunate. The term "team leadership" suggests a thrust toward a truly organic decision

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* Descriptive materials on the program may be obtained by writing Foster S. Buchtel, Program Director, W. K. Kellogg Foundation Program For the Development of Team Leadership At An Urban University, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio 44325.

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making system "with an emphasis on consultation and considerable attention to interpersonal and group processes, including methods of decision making and more frequent decisions by consensus." [3,185]. This thrust permitted an intervention into the organization of sufficient depth to produce considerable impact. [4] It also allowed for the clustering of several intervention sub-strategies, although some of these were never very precisely focused or operationalized. In the latter case, I should predict that their effects will be diffuse.

To briefly illustrate, a screened sample of 108 persons, representing both a vertical and horizontal mix of the university were admitted into the training. This group was subdivided into four classes of about 27 persons. Each class received about 65 hours of training in such interventions as role analysis, education on the structure and function of The University of Akron; education on issues of higher education, team building, analysis of intergroup relations, process consultation, and skill practice in alternative decision making models. These interventions received a focus appropriate to the goals of the program and the time available.

However, with the advantage of hindsight, it is now apparent that a potential career planning intervention did not receive explicit attention. To illustrate, one of the goals of the program was leadership development and involved the identification of individuals with leadership potential and the raising of their motivation and dedication.

This goal was addressed and met through the fact that graduates of the training gained at the minimum, advisory access to high decision making localities and that most of them formed into planning task forces which report to the highest reaches of the university. Eight participants also received internships to do high level cross-disciplinary and/or cross-functional studies within the university. These changes involved people in questions regarding their own careers. This observer noted that some of these were discussed informally with the program director, but at no point was there a systematic effort at career counseling or career planning. This represents a potential intervention into the system which was apparently overlooked.

Thus, we can see that some properties of the program were known and manifest, others were hidden and latent. Using the manifest/latent distinction, let us now look at some of the accomplishments and latent possibilities there.

PROCESS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

From the beginning, the program was constructed on the idea

that the burden of implementation and training would be carried by internal consultants and change agents - and specifically, by the Project Director himself. External consultants were to be used for purposes of summative evaluation, micro-planning, training design and the training of internal trainers. Placing the burden internally has the advantages of continuity, familiarity with the system and the opportunity to link together those persons who are actually working to improve organizational functioning. On the other hand, the internal consultant has problems of credibility. This was nicely circumvented due to the high visibility of the project, its high administrative support, and the fact that the internal and external consultants developed open, honest and friendly relations with each other. When they appeared together, neither did anything to undermine the credibility of the other. Indeed, since external consultants come with a kind of "built in" credibility, it is one of their primary jobs to help establish the credibility of the internal consultant. This project has demonstrated the conditions under which the burden of change can successfully be placed internally.

The program was successful in attracting high caliber participants. The training design called for a class composition to be 50% teaching faculty (all ranks represented) and the remaining 50% to be composed of administrators and support staff (General Faculty in the Akron University sense - non-teaching). Participation was voluntary, required an extensive application procedure and a considerable investment of individual time and energy. The net result was that all administrative ranks were represented, most service units were represented (e.g., Computer Center, Admissions, etc.), and the faculty participants were influence leaders in their respective areas and even campus wide. Although I am not suggesting a causal connection between these events, several persons received new leadership positions following their participation, and several received better positions on other campuses.

The cross-sectional composition of the classes had some other advantages. First of all, it allowed that the training would be "out of the context" of each participant's parochial concerns. This in turn permitted the content of the classes and the subject matter of training activities to be directed at concerns of the total organization. This aided the development of a transcendent General Systems perspective, which in turn helped cast a different light on the interconnectivity of sub-units. Secondly, the cross-sectional composition permitted a forum (in some participants' experience the only forum) wherein the different levels of the university could come into direct contact. In relation to this setting, training activities had two levels of purpose. On the one hand they were to

expose, and then get people to act upon the "mixed motive condition" found in modern universities, wherein people have both a cooperative and a competitive relationship to each other. [5,144] And on the other hand, the training activities focused attention on the differential perceptions such a cross section would, and did, produce. Participants were asked to explore the reasons behind these differing perceptions in terms of individual, group and structural concepts. In many cases they came to find out that there was more complimentarity of perception than they would have at first predicted. Participants generally found this perceptual approach to be quite useful.

A portion of the class time was turned over to simulated activities (exercises) which were aimed at developing participation. This participation element in team leadership is instrumental in obtaining acceptance and "ownership" of decisions which result from teamwork. This was important for at the end of the training phase, participants were invited to form planning task forces, which in turn reported to a high level planning commission attached to the president's office. Decisions made under the conditions of the team leadership approach are more likely to be understood and acted upon because those whom the decision effects have participated in its formulation.

An overall goal of the project design was to develop an expanded pool of persons who could serve in an advisory capacity to various long range planning activities. The project very clearly identified such people and gave them a background of training experience, thus making them very valuable to the decision making processes of Akron University.

LATENT POSSIBILITIES

It is fairly safe to say that the final evaluation of the team leadership program will show it to have been successful, and to have met its goals. However, there are several latencies in the program which appear now to be important - based, of course, on the great wisdom of hindsight.

An overarching latency comes from the term "program" itself. To the degree that people in the University of Akron community construe "program" to have definite beginning and ending points, there will be some difficulty in sustaining the change effort there. While the Kellogg "critical mass" was instrumental in getting the process of team leadership started, there are still several tests of residual commitment and energy which must be passed.

To maintain the residual energy for change it may be

necessary to develop intervention strategies which are complementary to team leadership, but which are much cheaper to implement. We can find these by looking again at organization theory, as was done in the formulative stages of the program itself. What we find implies a shift from an extensive, university-wide training program to a variety of more intensive and local interventions. These will require some coordination, but need not be too highly centralized. People will need to be reminded occasionally of the total system-wide implications of what they are doing but this should not be a great burden as that thrust was well established in the team leadership training.

An example of such a complementary intervention was mentioned, by way of illustration, at the beginning of this paper - career planning and counseling. I would like to use it again as an illustration, but now to develop two different points. First of all, its processes and methods (like the other interventions I shall develop below) are, no doubt, already known by some faculty members at Akron University. These people could be brought into the team leadership process by involving them in the training of all those who make personnel decisions. Some use of outside consultants would be helpful to augment the skills and lend credibility to the internal trainers. Secondly, career planning (like the other interventions I shall develop below) although specialized, must keep the totality of the organization in mind. It just makes no sense to do career planning for individuals, groups, departments, etc., unless those plans are intimately tied to the life career goals and purposes of the whole organization. The interconnection is inescapable; but it must be acknowledged, not assumed.

Organizational diagnoses is itself a form of intervention which is complementary to the team leadership approach. The purpose here is to create a data-base about organizational details, and from which more informed decisions can be made.[2] Survey methods are relatively inexpensive and The University of Akron no doubt has a group of people well schooled in their use. These people could be trained as a team, could do periodic surveys of the organization, and could serve on a "stand-by" basis to make interventions into local areas as problems or concerns arise. The data gathered in this process would also aid in the selection and timing of other forms of intervention. Furthermore, what is stated here surely does not exhaust the range and form of latencies. The diagnostic survey approach would, over time, gradually uncover these.

Feedback methods could be added to the survey intervention stated above.[1] The same or a different team could be trained in their use. Survey/feedback is a very effective form of intervention as it tends to reduce differential

perceptions as to what problems exist as well as their priorities of treatment. This would be a fairly easy addition to the team leadership thrust as there were several people in the Kellogg classes who could be quickly "brought up to speed" in this area. Their function would then only need to be legitimized to the larger community.

Closely related to survey/feedback is process consultation.[6] This is a latency in the Akron system because there were several participants in the Kellogg classes who showed great facility with this intervention. If these people and the system there were so disposed, these people could form a task team, be given some supplementary training have their function legitimized to the campus, and could have a very beneficial effect trouble shooting problems and generally aiding communication.

I shall deal with one last latency, which I believe is of considerable importance. The Kellogg classes were deliberately composed of a cross section of the campus. The result was heterogeneous composition in terms of each member's affiliation with the university. This was the desired training model as it led to exploring relationships across the differing levels and areas of the organization. For its purposes, it works fine. And since not all of the Akron community have participated it could be continued. However, I believe another thrust is needed. This involves training, data gathering and feedback sessions with the people who compose a particular work group. Here, the thrust would be on horizontal power. The focus would be on aiding through various interventions, the decision making capabilities of coacting peers. Since the condition of coacting peers is so very common in universities, this different training thrust has considerable potential to sharpen and hone the general level of decision capabilities within the system. To some degree this change in focus to particular work groups is happening at The University of Akron. However, the team leadership training materials were designed for a cross sectional clientele. A different training method is called for when dealing with persons who come from the same work unit. This change in method has to date, not been systematically implemented.

What is needed in the overall sense with respect to these latencies, is the maintenance of the team leadership thrust. The interventions I have discussed here should not be construed to supplant that thrust. Team leadership is needed because it is the way to maintain a coherent and transcendent integrity over the various intensive interventions I've discussed. Team leadership is needed because it is the way to maintain the sense of the "critical mass" brought by Kellogg, even after Kellogg has gone.

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